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Rev. H. W. Higginson

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THE

BIRTHDAY IN FAIRY-LAND:

A Story for Children.

BY T. W. HIGGINSON.

BOSTON:

WM. CROSBY AND H. P. NICHOLS,

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Rev. J. W. Higginson
Sept. 21, 1858 TO THE
CHILDREN OF THE PLEASANT-STREET CHURCH,

Newburyport.

I WROTE this story, dear children, long before I
had seen any of you, for a little niece of mine,
on her birthday; but it is now printed for you,
because I want to leave with you some memorial
of my love.

THE

BIRTHDAY IN FAIRY-LAND.

Now, I must say to all the people who are sitting down to read this story, that they must guess for themselves when it all took place; for I am certainly not going to tell them. And I am not going to inform them who the little girl is, whose adventures it relates; only that she is sitting on a footstool before me now, reading about fairies, and that her name is ANNIE.

Reading about fairies, I say — about those grand times when this beautiful world was not enjoyed only by great awkward men and women, with a few troublesome little boys and girls — but when thousands of little invisible beings (not to be seen by our dull eyes at least) hovered over the earth,

crowding all about us, and watching all our motions ; when not a bush or shrub but was the scene of tiny sports, and not a sod but bore the print of tiny feet ; when every flower-bud overflowed with honey - dew ; every blade of grass, as it waved in the wind, rocked the cradle of an elfin child ; and every hanging bough was laden with little beings, who did not weigh it down, as it swung to and fro ! And happy the mortal to whom these mysterious creatures were willing to show themselves. So at least it seemed to Annie, who closed her book, and put both hands over her eyes, to see if she could imagine how a fairy would look.

“ Oh,” sighed Annie, “ it is too bad ! I wouldn’t care for any thing else, if I could only have lived in times when I could have seen a fairy ! ”

She started ; for a strain of soft music seemed to come faintly to her ears, and stopped as she held her breath to listen.

“It would be easy to guess what that was, if there were fairies now,” murmured Annie. “But no, they are all gone!”

Again the sweet music sounded, but louder and nearer; and then she heard a silvery voice that seemed close by, singing —

“Oh no! oh no!
Fairy creatures are not dead,
Fairy pleasures are not fled,
Fairy bowers are not shaded,
Fairy blossoms are not faded;
Fairy skies are ever fair,
Fairy forms still fill the air:
Mortal! if thou one wouldst see,
Ope thine eyes, and gaze on me!”

Annie raised her eyes, and oh! the lovely vision that appeared before her — of a little being floating in the air, dressed in a mantle of blue violet-petals, and a gipsy hat of the white anemone flower, and with such blue eyes and golden hair as were never seen certainly in a mortal face. But she saw her for a moment only; for, as Annie looked, the figure seemed gradually to fade

away to a shadow, and then disappear entirely, as the same silvery voice warbled in a lower tone, —

“ Fairy bands may never sever,
Fairy homes are bright as ever :
Mortal ! if thou them wouldst see,
Fear no ill, but follow me ! ”

“ Take me, oh take me ! ” cried Annie, eagerly starting from her seat. And again the music swelled up, and for a moment she thought she saw the blue eyes and the golden hair gleam beneath the white anemone before her ; but she looked again, and it seemed only a white flower-petal, with a few blue and yellow tints, that a passing breeze had floated through the window. But the music was no fancy ; for a chorus of tiny voices seemed to sing, —

“ Away, away, to our Fairy Land,
Till again on its charmed earth we stand ;
And thus, O mortal ! we take thy hand :
Away, away, to our Fairy Land ! ”

Then Annie felt a soft pressure on her

hands from little hands unseen, which yet were strong enough to raise her from the ground. But what way she went, whether it was through the window, the roof, the floor, or the wall, she knew not, and as little did she know whither her invisible supporters bore her afterwards; for she felt nothing more until she came to her senses, and found herself floating on a fragrant raft of flowers and green leaves heaped loosely together, across a gentle and shady river. Hands unseen lifted her from her sweet couch, when the bank was reached, and voices unseen sung, —

“Happy stranger ! here you stand
Safe at last on Fairy Land,
By our fragrant breezes fanned.

Gaze upon us without fear :
Thou art welcome, stranger, here,
To our homes and comrades dear.

Welcome to these joyous bowers,
Welcome to our birds and flowers,
Welcome to our happy hours.”

And, as they sung, Annie seemed to feel a veil drop from her eyes, and a change came over all her senses ; she seemed to breathe a purer air, to inhale sweeter odors, to hear lovelier sounds, and to tread on softer earth.

And oh ! the view that was presented to her eyes. A city seemed to lie extended before her, a city in miniature, with streets and gardens and houses and palaces ; — streets brilliantly paved with the wing-cases of beetles, and shaded by rows of lofty golden rods ; gardens with high hedges of pansies and pinks, and neatly laid out in walks and beds, with flowers smaller than the smallest cup-moss (such as we have never seen except with a microscope, and have no names for), with ornamental shrubs, such as buttercups and daffodils, with fruitful orchards of currants and raspberries, and magnificent forests of rose-bushes ; houses of every variety of material, color, and form, from the simple cottage of green

leaves and twigs, up to the stately mansion of many-colored tulip-petals, with its splendid colonnade of tulip-stems; and vast palaces with various ornaments, some bearing a dome of the inverted cup of a large white lily! And among all these streets and buildings were moving busily about little forms of men and women, of the same size with a group who stood around Annie. And Annie knew that she was in FAIRY LAND!

“Well,” said Annie, sitting down on the grass, “will some one please to tell me if this is real or a dream? Are you really fairies? Often and often have I wished to see you and your land; but I have always been told, that, if you really ever did live, it was a great while ago, and that only silly little children believed in you now.”

“You see that it was you who were right,” replied a gentle voice from among the fairies: “men think we do not live, because

they do not see us. We have ceased to live as we once did among the haunts of men ; but we still hover around them continually, and spend a large portion of our time in doing them service, without their knowing it. For years no mortal has seen us, and many have forgotten us. Our homes are invisible to all but you, and it is by the favor of our Queen only that you are allowed to approach them. She sent us to bring you hither, and now she herself is coming. Do you not hear ? ”

Annie listened ; and well she knew the sweet sounds which seemed rapidly approaching. And suddenly there appeared before her eyes a chariot drawn by butterflies, and made of a half-blown rose, and upon it sat that sweet form in the blue mantle. Around her floated on golden wings a crowd of fairy forms, some bearing in their hands the tiny flutes and trumpets from which the familiar music came ; while others, as they

came near, began to sing, in the same sweet melody which Annie had heard before, but which now sounded still sweeter in this new atmosphere, these words:—

“For many an hour we have wandered o’er
Dark hill-side and forest green;
By verdant meadow and flowery shore,
We have hovered around the car which bore
Our Fairy Queen,
Our Fairy Queen!

O’er sorrow and pain and grief have we flown,
O’er many a saddened scene;
But sorrow is past, and joy alone
Is left in the path where the step is known
Of our Fairy Queen,
Our Fairy Queen!

But hither, hither, each fay that roves,
Let your graceful forms be seen
Where fresher flowers and greener groves
Welcome the child whom Aglauré loves
To the realm of our Fairy Queen,
Our Fairy Queen!”

The song ceased; the fairies fell back, and left Aglauré (for that was the name of the Queen, Annie’s beautiful visitor) standing alone in front. And, as Annie looked,

her lovely lips opened ; and, with a voice that sounded like the murmuring of a brook that seeks protection from the hot sun's rays under the overhanging boughs and grass, she said these words : " Often, dear Annie, I have been near you in your earthly home ; when your heart has been weary of the common duties of every day, and you have sighed and wished to be released, to sport with us under some old tree which looks down kindly on our revels, to feast with us on the dew-filled acorn-cup, with us to wander at will over that wide earth of which you have seen so little. Often have these thoughts crossed your mind, and you have said to yourself that nothing which home could give was to be compared with the delights of fairy power and liberty. But I do not wish you, dear child, to think that it is so : if you could look into the hearts of fairies, as you will soon look into their lives, and compare them with those of men, you would soon see

the secret of happiness ; that with love and duty every mortal can be happy, while without them no fairy can have true pleasure. Our powers and privileges are greater than yours, but so are our duties : it is always so, and joy is equally in the power of all."

She paused ; and the sweet-toned choir sung, —

" Joy of lives that seek to be
What daily duties may decree ;
Joy of love, sincere and true,
Felt toward all to whom 'tis due ;
'These the joys that mortals bless,
'These make fairies' happiness."

" That is the true secret of pleasure," continued the gentle fairy, when the music ceased. " And now for a visit to my palace."

Aglauré waved her wand, and, while the chariot descended to the ground at Annie's side, she suddenly felt a change come over her ; and, when she looked round her again, she seemed to be standing near a mighty

city, with a stately chariot and a noble lady by her side ; but in a moment Annie perceived what was really the case, that the change was in herself, for that she had assumed the size and form of the fairies by whom she was surrounded. But, without staying to wonder at the change, she ascended to the side of Aglauré ; the butterflies moved forward, and, entering the city, went proudly on, surrounded by troops of fairies, until they entered the palace. There the magnificence almost startled Annie, who seemed to have thrown off all her mortal feelings with her mortal shape.

When they had entered the palace, Aglauré left them, while Annie was led into a large hall. The same fairy with whom she had been speaking at the Queen's approach soon came to her, and said, " Do you know, Annie, the occasion on which you have been brought hither ? " And when Annie replied that she did not, — " You

must know then," the fairy continued, "that Eudora, the eldest daughter of Queen Aglauré, has this day reached her tenth year; and that, as a reward for the sweetness and virtue she has shown for the last year, there is to be a grand entertainment at the palace, at which all the children of the city have been invited to be present, four of whom have been selected to place a crown on the head of Eudora, and then"— Here she was interrupted by the sudden stroke of a bell in another part of the palace, which, clear and musical, rang through the halls, loud at first, and dying so gradually away that you could hardly know when the faint murmur ceased.

"Hasten! hasten!" cried the fairy, "the bluebell rings, to call us to the Hall of the Crowning;" and, as they went, a messenger from the Queen met them, to call Annie to stand by her side.

I cannot undertake to describe the cere-

mony of crowning ; the beauty of the vast hall, crowded by graceful forms, whose sparkling wings made the golden sunshine yet more golden ; or the beautiful array of children, all dressed in frocks made of white violet-petals. The four who were to crown Eudora wore each a glittering crown of real fire-fly sparkles ; but Eudora's was a single wreath. I cannot describe the murmur of delight when it was placed on her brow ; how modest she looked, and how proud Aglauré seemed. I must leave these to be imagined, and tell how, after it was over, a prelude of sweet music was heard from a single flute (made of a windflower stalk), and the well-known choir sung this song : —

“ Fairest flower on fairy field,
Greenest leaf on fairy tree,
All your graceful beauties yield
In Eudora's wreath to be ;
While you can, your freshness give,
Lend your sweetness while you live.
Flower-crowns must fade away,
Crowns of virtue ever stay.

We, who on Eudora's head
Place the wreath our hands have made,
Know that soon its charms are fled,
Soon its summer hues must fade;
But Eudora's sweetness gains
Another wreath that still remains.
Flower-crowns must fade away,
Crowns of virtue ever stay.

Happy she who gains this wreath, —
'Tis to love and duty given;
Happy in this world beneath,
Happy in the thought of Heaven;
Common ills may strive in vain
To change this happiness to pain.
Flower-crowns must fade away,
Crowns of virtue ever stay."

"Prove this to be true, my darling child,"
said Aglauré to her daughter, "and I ask
no more. And now go to your playmates."

If I said that I could not possibly describe
the scene of the crowning, I certainly should
be very rash to try to describe the sports of
that wonderful afternoon. I only know that
every amusement and delight that human
and fairy experience put together could con-

trive, — every sport and game ever played upon this earth, and (so far as I know) on all the other earths, — all were put in practice there ; and Annie thought the fairy children, and the fairy children thought Annie, quite the most delightful companions ever known. And it was not till all were so thoroughly tired out that they had to sit down and rest, that any one of that happy band would pause for a moment.

“ Dear Annie,” said Aglauré, as she came at last to rest her weary limbs by the side of the Queen, “ are you willing to stay with us for ever, and never go back to your home on earth ? ”

“ Oh yes, yes ! ” said Annie, “ for, though I have dreamed of fairies all my life, I never dreamed of having such a good time. I never want to see my home again, and I have almost forgotten how it looks. But where is Eudora gone ? At first she was the gayest of all, and those always seemed

happiest who were nearest her ; but now I do not see her.”

“ She has not been here for some time,” said the Queen ; “ for there are beings dearer to her than even these playmates, happy as your play has been. Come with me, and you shall see that I spoke the truth in what I said to you before we entered the city.”

Annie followed the Queen through a long and lofty passage-way, at the end of which Aglauré threw open the door, and entered a smaller apartment. And there a beautiful scene was before them. Eudora was seated in a large chair, surrounded by as lovely a group as ever artist painted, — a group of brothers and sisters, — of whom two boys were clinging to her chair, and chattering to her as fast as their tongues could go ; a third (whose eager face, as it looked up at Annie, reminded her too well of the sunny eyes and fair hair of a certain earthly child she had not quite forgotten) was seated on the floor,

just finishing a house built of blocks, by putting for a roof *the crown itself*; which the fourth, a baby in Eudora's arms, had taken and thrown to the ground, without her ever finding it out! No wonder Eudora had left the crowded hall!

Annie looked intently at the lovely scene; and by degrees a mist seemed to gather over her mind, and soon thick and fast came back the memories of home, and feelings that had been for a time laid aside in the excitement of these new scenes came rushing in upon her heart, and she seemed to see before her the group of loving ones at her own dear home. All was like the fairy scene before her—the two busy talkers, and the little architect, and even the baby, all were there; but the chair was empty, and where was Annie? “And shall I never, never, see the darlings again?” thought she; “and have I agreed to stay here for ever, and let them look for me in

vain, and at last mourn for me as lost? Oh! how foolish and wicked I was to think, that any thing here could give me any pleasure, without having them with me!" And she covered her face with her hands; but the tears stole out between them, and fell thick and fast on the ground. "Oh, kind Aglauré," she cried, "let me go back to my home on earth. How could I ever dream of being happy anywhere else! Oh! take me there again!"

"Dear Annie," said the beautiful Queen, bending tenderly over her, "I had never a wish to prevent you from returning to that happy home. Believe me, my only wish was to make you value it better, to teach you the truth I told you when I entered the city, and to show it to you by the example of my Eudora. I tell you again the true secret of happiness: with love and duty, every mortal may be happy, and no fairy can ever be so without them. Take this

lesson with you to your home, and so farewell ! ”

Aglauré placed one hand in Annie’s, and waved her wand. The room seemed suddenly darkened, — a confused feeling overclouded her senses, — there was a moment of insensibility ; through all which she still held fast to the hand of the Queen, pressing it as if for support ; and she still held it when her senses, and the light and the air, came back to her, and lo ! she was sitting in her own chair at her own home, — and, wonder of wonders ! — the Queen Aglauré was her own dear mother !

“ I should think you had slept almost enough, Annie,” said Stevie, rather scornfully.

“ You’ve been asleep all through mother’s beautiful story,” said Willie.

“ Lazy girl,” stammered out little Agnes.

And even Master Baby expressed his opinion by opening his blue eyes wider and wider, as if to make up for Annie's being shut so long.

"O mother, mother!" cried Annie, as she threw herself into her mother's arms, "I never will leave you again, for Fairy Land or Dream Land either. But what was that sound?"

No one heard it but Annie; but it was low distant music, dying away in the words, "FAREWELL, FAREWELL."

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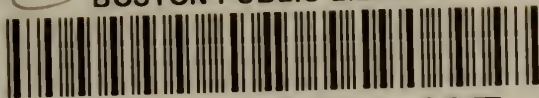
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